

**The Deemphasis of Ethnicity:
Images of Koreanness in the Works of the Japanese-Korean
Author Yû Miri**

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2. Summary

This paper analyses images of Koreanness as conveyed in the works of Yû Miri, a highly successful Japanese-Korean author born in 1968. In contrast to many earlier writers of this minority, Yû is unconcerned with challenging discrimination and barely even addresses the situation of Koreans in Japan in her works. Analysing both Yû's first and newer novels, as well as taking a closer look at remarks she made in a less literary

context, I will show that her approach seems apolitical only at first glance. Considering the background of highly ideological and ‘politically correct’ Korean minority writing, it becomes clear that Yû’s deemphasis of ethnicity as well as her ignorance towards the traditional concerns of Japanese-Korean authors actually represent a new radicalism.

However, the argument will not only be confined to the discussion of Yû’s works in relation to other minority writers. A second focus is placed on the changes of attitude which have become visible over time within Yû’s work itself. While her earlier works reflect a rather negative view of Korea(ns), she recently seems to be taking a more affirmative stance. Linking these diverging images to events in the author’s private life, I will suggest possible reasons for the discrepancies.

3. Introduction

Yû Miri, a best-selling contemporary author of Korean origin living and writing in Japan, has over the past few years gained great popularity with a broad readership and is now beginning to draw increasing academic attention as well.

Considering this author’s South Korean nationality, it seems particularly intriguing to look at what image of ‘Asia’ is drawn in her works and how the relationship between Japan and other Asian countries (in this case, Korea) is interpreted: Since Yû is writing in Japanese, for a mainly Japanese audience, depicting Korea(ns) means that she is actively contributing to the ongoing ‘Asian Debate’ in Japan. As a non-Japanese Asian national, however, she is at the same time a (passive) subject of this debate as well. This dualism which can also be found in her works enables me to discuss “images of Asia in Japanese mass media, popular culture and literature” from a slightly different perspective than would be done in the case of writers of Japanese nationality. Hopefully, this approach will provide the research on the depiction of ‘Asia’ in contemporary Japanese media with some new aspects.

I will start by giving some background information on the author and then examine the representation of Korea and Koreans in Yû’s works. A general analysis will be followed by a more detailed discussion of her first novel, *Ishi ni oyogu sakana* (*Fish swimming in stones*, 1994), which can be regarded as representative of the depiction of Korea and its people in Yû’s early work. This in-depth analysis will reveal a not overwhelmingly positive view of Korea(ns).

However, Yû Miri is not only known as a novelist but is a celebrity featured in magazines and TV-shows as well. Therefore it seems necessary to include statements made by her in a less literary context. These remarks which will be discussed in the last section of the paper give a very different impression of Yû’s attitude towards Korea.

Linking these diverging images to events in the author's private life, I will suggest possible reasons for these discrepancies.

4. Yû Miri: A Short Introduction

Yû Miri was born in a prefecture near Tôkyô in 1968. Her parents, both born in Korea, migrated to Japan during their early childhood, shortly before the outbreak of the Korean War. This makes Yû a second generation member of the Korean minority in Japan¹, but despite this, she is unable to speak, read or write Korean.

Yû Miri's family broke up even before all of her three younger siblings entered school. Frequent violence at home and years of serious bullying at school finally brought about several attempts at suicide. Shortly after being expelled from the elite high school she was attending, Miri joined a theater group² whose leader accepted her not despite, but because of her troubled past, telling her that all the negative experiences she had suffered so far would turn into a plus if she were to pursue a life on stage. This encounter became a turning point in Yû's life.³

After only two years, she gave up acting and switched to writing plays and, later, novels, winning several noted literary prizes, including the Akutagawa Prize (1997). However, until this day she is leading a 'life on stage', writing extensively about her past and present life. Writing has become the central element of her life, she says only writing "enabled [her] to breath freely in the real world as well" (Yû, 1993 (b), p. 126).

5. Yû Miri's rejection of national identification

Since Yû Miri has (South) Korean nationality, one might be tempted to discuss her works in the framework of *zainichi bungaku*, the literature of the Korean minority in Japan.⁴ However, leaving aside the question of whether this is advisable in Yû's case, this approach is somewhat problematic for it is difficult to give a precise and accurate definition of *zainichi bungaku*. For example, can every piece of literature written by a Korean minority author be counted as *zainichi bungaku*, regardless of its content? Or are there certain requirements concerning style or literary theme to be met? If so, who sets the criteria and decides the classification of literature as *zainichi bungaku*? The Korean minority in Japan is undergoing rapid change, but is the (normative) definition of *zainichi bungaku* changing as well? Thinking about these and other questions, it becomes clear that *zainichi bungaku* is limited as an analytical term.

There are, however, several traits that works of *zainichi* writers have in common. On

the whole, their literature has been strongly influenced by colonial history, the political situation in Japan and the two Koreas, questions of language, cultural differences and discrimination. In general, *zainichi* authors have long been writing from a position *outside* Japanese society, orienting themselves towards an often idealized Korean homeland (*sokoku*). In the eighties, things began to change as Yi Yang-chi (1955-92) broke a taboo by writing about young *zainichi* who went to Korea in the hope of *returning to a true home*, but were faced with a very different reality and came to experience a severe culture shock.

There have always been minority authors who won high acclaim, but especially in the last decade, the literature of young *zainichi* writers has been enjoying growing interest as these authors were awarded a number of prestigious literary prizes.⁵ This is particularly true in the case of Yû Miri, she has gained unprecedented popularity. She is the first *zainichi* author that can be regarded as a trendsetter influencing mainstream Japanese society. She “has been writing in a variety of genres and [is] widely involved in different sectors of popular culture, including fashion magazines and television talk shows” (Yoneyama, 2000, p. 103). This attention and the commercial success of Yû, and other such authors, must be seen in connection with the rising Japanese interest in Asia. Yû Miri commented on this by saying “nowadays one can buy *kim’chi* in every convenience store, but then again many of the young people who buy it have never even heard about the existence of a Korean minority in Japan. The gap between a rather superficial Asia-boom and actual knowledge or interest in Asia is huge yet still widening.”⁶ Yû Miri’s assessment of the interest in things Asian in general corresponds to Lisa Yoneyama’s observation that the popularity of *zainichi* authors “must be juxtaposed to the society’s overall lack of interest to the legal and socio-economic hardships and discrimination which many *zainichi* continue to face on a daily basis” (Yoneyama, 2000, p. 104).

Yû’s great success certainly has to do with the fact that she is not primarily writing about problems concerning the minority (which means that confining the discussion of her works to the Korean aspect would do her injustice). She never describes Korea as (an idealised) homeland or, to be more precise, as a place that ought to be thought of as such. There are no political undertones in her novels, she does not concern herself with fighting against discrimination, nor does she criticise Japanese society *from an outsider’s position*.⁷ Yû does not place much emphasis on the fact that she is Korean at all and barely even addresses the situation of Koreans in Japan in her works. She has written about 20 theatre plays and novels, but only about 4 or 5 of her protagonists are obviously Japanese-Korean⁸, and even in these cases their nationality seems almost irrelevant.⁹ In 1997, Yû Miri said the following about her works: “I just don’t want to write a novel that mainly deals with the problems of Koreans in Japan, simply because if I did so, the discussion of my works would exclusively take place within the context of a general *zainichi* discourse, and no one would read my literature as an individual account of my experiences and emotions.” She adds, “I am neither Japanese nor Korean,

and that is exactly the perspective from which I want to write” (both *Bungakkai*, 1997 (3), p. 134).¹⁰

However, Yû is neither trying to hide her Korean nationality, nor does she seem to be suppressing or avoiding the topic. Many of her characters, who often are extremely introverted, do indeed have identity problems, but none turns to ‘Japan’ or ‘Korea’ in search of a solution. They do not question their ethnicity as the source of their problems, nor do they think in national categories: Especially for the protagonists of Yû’s early works, these are matters of the outside world to which they cannot relate.

In summer 2001, I had the opportunity to meet Yû Miri.¹¹ During the interview she explained that she was addressing a broad readership, stressing that she wants to write about problems typical of modern societies. “I am sure there are not only Japanese-Koreans, but also Japanese (*zainichi nihonjin*), Taiwanese and people in general in other countries who can identify with my writings. I want to write about real life and would hate to confine myself to artificial limitations.”¹² For a *zainichi* author, this is a completely new approach that only at first glance seems apolitical. In order to illustrate Yû’s new radicalism that lies in her deemphasis of ethnicity and her ignorance towards traditional *zainichi* authors’ concerns, I want to take a closer look at Yû’s first novel, *Ishi ni oyogu sakana* and examine the representation of Korea and Koreans in this highly autobiographical work.

6. On the image of Korea and Koreans in Yû Miri’s works

The protagonist of *Ishi ni oyogu sakana* acts as a first-person narrator, she is a young woman named Hiraka. Hiraka is a second generation Japanese-Korean (unable to understand Korean) whose family background and problematic personal history strongly resemble that of the author Yû Miri herself. Hiraka has been writing plays for a small theatre in Tôkyô for about 10 years. As one of her plays is put on stage in Korea, Hiraka leaves Japan for the first time and travels to the land of her origin. There she meets Rifa, a young Korean woman whose face is covered with a huge birthmark. At first, Hiraka cannot bear looking at her, but at the same time she feels strongly drawn towards Rifa. In the course of the novel, Hiraka slowly realises that Rifa is the first person she has ever met who she can fully trust. She completely identifies with Rifa whose birthmark seems to mirror Hiraka’s own emotional wounds. In the end, however, Hiraka is left behind by Rifa and has to painfully admit that her perceived oneness with Rifa was an illusion from the very start. The relationship between the two women and its development lies in the centre of the story, but here I want to look at Hiraka’s experiences in Korea described in the first part of the novel.

Since Hiraka has not taken on a so-called *tsûmei*, a Japanese pseudonym, but is using

the Korean reading of her last name, *Yang*, it is obvious that she does not perceive her Korean nationality as something shameful that needs to be hidden. However, apart from that the reader gets no information on how she feels about being a Korean in Japan. It becomes clear though, that Hiraka has a strong sense of being “different” in the same way that the author, Yû Miri claims to be neither Korean nor Japanese.¹³ Hiraka’s whole personality seems somehow based on this consciousness that is further emphasised by the duty to always carry an alien registration card. As long as she is living in Japan, her *identity based on difference* is recognized by Japanese society and therefore never really threatened.

As Hiraka arrives in Korea, however, the conditions change. For the brief moment of immigration control, these perceived differences which have governed Hiraka’s life so far (and have in a way given her a feeling of security) all of a sudden become invisible to others: Being Japanese-Korean, Hiraka expects to be extra-carefully checked, she is very nervous. However, as a South Korean national, she is carrying a Korean passport, which in the eyes of the customs officer makes her just another young woman returning from an overseas trip. In the novel Hiraka says “he just looked at me as if he was stroking me with a soft brush” (Yû, 1994, p. 23) and he let Hiraka pass without even bothering to check her bags. Being treated the same way as other Koreans, Hiraka is in no way relieved but “for no apparent reason, [...] felt uneasy”. She says “I was surprised to find I felt humiliated because I was obviously regarded as brethren and therefore welcomed by ignorance” (both Yû, 1994, p. 23).

On the other hand, Hiraka’s own continued emphasis on difference becomes the target of Korean criticism. She meets with harsh opposition because she does not understand her ‘mother tongue’ and is not trying to learn it either. The reason for this is that Hiraka’s parents, who usually spoke Japanese, switched to Korean only when they got into a fight – which apparently was on a daily basis. This close connection between violent confrontation and the Korean language caused Hiraka’s strong and continuing dislike of even the sound of the language. However, the Koreans do not accept this explanation. Just as if she had openly marked Korean culture as inferior, they feel insulted by Hiraka’s somewhat vague position of “being neither Japanese nor Korean.” Hiraka is shocked to find her whole personality not only questioned but openly rejected at a fundamental level. During her stay, Hiraka’s fear and insecurity grow stronger every day.

Yû Miri is choosing to focus on culture shock to describe her protagonist’s reaction to the country of her origin – a topic not uncommon in the works of younger *zainichi* authors. Yû introduces another character, Kim Chi-Hee, who functions as the personification of all negative aspects of Korea. Being the one who brought Hiraka to Korea, Kim keeps pointing out to her that “different from the Japanese, the Koreans are very emotional” (Yû, 1994, p. 27) and that when speaking to Koreans she “must not apologise and say thank you all the time” (Yû, 1994, p. 27). The two are waiting for a

press conference to begin, when the tension between them reaches its climax as Kim casually brings up a delicate topic:

“By the way, I want you to say that you wrote the play in Korean.”

I did not trust my ears.

“I’m afraid I don’t quite understand what you mean by this?”

“Well, I just want you to say that you studied Korean while you were in Japan. It will definitely be more of a sensation if we present this as a play that you, the Japanese-Korean author Ms. Yang wrote in your mother tongue and that is now being put on stage in the land of your ancestors. Just trust me.”

Kim carefully stubbed out a cigarette I had only halfway extinguished.

“When did this come up?”

“Be careful with your cigarettes, it’s dangerous.”

“Please answer my question.”

“Maybe a week ago,” Kim said with a calm voice.

“That’s well before I came to Korea, isn’t it? (...) If I had known that earlier, I would never have come!”

(...)

“The journalists have already been informed. If you don’t cooperate, we’ll get in trouble” (Yû, 1994, pp. 38-39).¹⁴

Kim is thus described as a loud, selfish man who does not consider the feelings of others. Hiraka, who does not even have the courage to pronounce simple greetings in Korean, is appalled at Kim’s inconsiderate behaviour, she feels embarrassed, even ridiculed. Completely out of her mind, she runs out of the café, only to find herself surrounded by more (seemingly) hostile Koreans. Unable to make herself understood at a ticket counter, Hiraka panics. She says

“All at once, the surrounding people turned towards me and stared. Deep-set brown eyes, sharp cheekbones, long chins – I was surrounded by about 10 fiercely hostile Koreans. A middle-aged woman was carrying a baby that started to scream like a pig hungry for food. Incited by this voice they showered me with sneering remarks [that hurt] like red-hot tongs. Caught by terror, I fell forward to the ground and rolled on my side, gasping for air. Their faces turned an ugly deep red, and with their nostrils flaring they were breathing heavily as they narrowed the circle, almost crushing me” (Yû, 1994, p. 41).

Hiraka, born and brought up in Japan and therefore living by the rules and ideals of Japanese society, has been in a state of shock from the day she entered Korea. She meets with unexpected opposition, even contempt, which makes it impossible for her to feel even the slightest bit of familiarity or closeness. She strongly rejects Kim’s attempt to forcefully extinguish her Japanese identity and refuses to be selfishly embraced by Korea, a country alien and foreign.

It is striking that in this novel written by a Japanese-Korean author, we do not find any Korean presented in a positive way. Of course there is Rifa, who Hiraka very much identifies with, but this young woman cannot be regarded as a purely Korean character: First of all, Rifa's deformed face clearly marks her as different from others. Secondly, since she was born in Japan as a third generation Korean and migrated to Korea only as a teenager, Rifa speaks fluent Japanese. And thirdly, she moves back to Japan almost immediately after getting to know Hiraka, so that their relationship really develops in Japan. Therefore, one cannot speak of an inter-Asian encounter with a saviour figure in the sense of the depiction patterns – namely exoticism, salvation, and horror – identified by the media researcher Werner Faulstich (1996).¹⁵ Even though 'salvation' is a major theme of this novel when read in its entirety, regarding the depiction of Korea the latter aspect of 'horror' seems more applicable.

But why, it may be asked, did Yû Miri choose to portray Korea as a place of horror, why is she characterising its people as selfish, loud and aggressive – an image that corresponds to the negative stereotype held by many Japanese? In *Ishi ni oyogu sakana*, the author is not distancing herself from these images, she is clearly not using them ironically as a means to show Hiraka as a (pitiful) character alienated from her 'homeland' through her life in Japan. But could it really be true that Yû Miri is unaware of the danger of contributing to the perpetuation of negative stereotypes? Has Yû Miri really "ceased to see the significance of addressing the injustice and oppression" (Yoneyama 2000, p. 105) caused by ethnic and national differences? Probably, Yû's seemingly careless use of stereotypes must be explained by the author's above mentioned apolitical stance and her strong aversion to being told what and how to write as she explains: "I want to write what I like, and still use my Korean name (*honmyô de suki na koto wo kakitai*)."¹⁶ Considering the background of highly ideological and politically correct *zainichi* writing, it becomes clear that this simple sentence means an immense provocation – no different from many earlier *zainichi* writers, Yû Miri must be called a radical in her own way.

7. Searching for a link with the past

Yû Miri has so far chosen not to write about it in her novels, but apart from this rather negative description of a first encounter with a foreign 'homeland' there are other statements that give a different impression of the author's attitude towards Korea.

In search of her roots and determined to shed some light on her family background, Yû Miri departed on a trip to the small Korean town of Milyang where her mother's family had lived for generations. Yû Miri's grandfather had one day left his country for Japan without any prior notice, leaving his wife and young children behind. A few years later

his wife followed him and the family was reunited under somewhat chaotic circumstances. During her journey, which was documented by NHK and broadcasted in June 1996, Yû Miri met several of her grandfather's old friends and acquaintances, asking them about possible reasons for his sudden departure.

“This is exactly like the place I have been dreaming of as a child” – wandering through the alleys of Milyang, Yû Miri gives a very personal account of her emotions that comes much closer to a nostalgic ‘rediscovery of Asia’ than to the horror described above:

“It just doesn't feel like coming here for the first time. There is something so familiar about this place. If I look at the people passing by, their faces look just like my father's or my aunt's.

My father always used to sit on a chair in front of the house nibbling tomatoes, but that was regarded as an indecent thing to do. But if you take a look at the houses here, they all have chairs out. I realised that here, it is a completely natural thing to be eating or playing cards in front of the house.

Another thing is that in elementary school, I was completely unable to communicate with others, and I think the reason for this was that my home and my family were weird. I really feel a little sad now when I think that there would have been absolutely nothing weird about us here” (NHK, 1996).

During my interview with the author, she repeated that in the same way she could not feel fully at home in Japan, Korea was not a completely foreign country to her. “The only difference is the language that I don't understand, that's all.”¹⁷ Yû Miri is clearly not living *with* but rather somewhere *between* two cultures, unable – and probably unwilling – to claim one of them as her own.

There is, however, another difference: Yû Miri is not only unable to speak the language, she is unfamiliar with the customs and traditions of Korea as well. And precisely this is why in autumn of 1999 she decided in favour of Japanese citizenship for the baby she was expecting from a Japanese man.

“The reason I chose Japanese nationality for the child soon to be born was (...) that I am finding myself in conflict, having contradictory feelings about being Korean. Since Japanese is all I can speak and write, of course I will speak to the child in Japanese only. I do not know a single thing about Korean culture that I could pass on to the child. (...) This does not mean I am not feeling any pain giving my child Japanese nationality. In kindergarten, it will listen to Japanese fairy tales, and in elementary school it will be singing ‘*Kimi ga yo*’ as its own national anthem. My child and I will be having different nationalities and the child will all alone be

holding a new family register. But one day, I am convinced, it will be grateful for my decision. Still, a faint feeling of loss and pain will remain, become a scar and stay with me for ever” (Yû, 2000, pp. 92-93).

When asked about dual citizenship – which is generally given to children if one parent has foreign nationality – Yû Miri told me her son had been refused this option because she was a single mother while the father of the child was married to another woman. Moreover, in the case of a foreign single mother, even Japanese citizenship for the child can only be obtained if the father’s recognition is handed in *before* the child is born. Yû Miri was very upset at this, calling this discrimination an even “more serious problem than [the refusal of the] local suffrage for permanent foreign residents” (Yû, 2000, p. 104).

Through her pregnancy, Yû Miri was confronted with the problem of nationality in a more compelling way than ever before. She has made a very far-reaching decision and seems now determined to let her son – whose surname is read in Japanese as *Yanagi* – grow up no different from any other Japanese boy. Consequently, she wore a *kimono* to celebrate the day of his first visit to a *shintô*-shrine.¹⁸ Under no circumstances, Yû Miri explained, would she ever wear a *kimono* on her own festive occasions, but *as the mother of a Japanese* she would continue to do so.¹⁹

This episode clearly shows how thoroughly Yû Miri is trying to eliminate any ambiguity or (seeming) contradiction concerning her son’s position. While at first glance it seems as if she had been greatly influenced by the ideology of unity of culture, language and nationality propagated by modern nation states, she is, as one can tell from the arguments used in her most political essay series *Kamen no kuni – Land of masks*, in fact clearly aware of the newness of the idea of nations and nation states (Yû, 1998, pp. 11-12). Thus one could say that, accepting these inventions as a given, Yû Miri is trying to adjust her son’s data to present day conditions and fit him into a modern nation state, namely that of Japan.

As I have mentioned before, Yû Miri has until recently never shown much (public) interest in issues like ‘identity’ and ‘nationality’, she has been maintaining a rather ambiguous attitude, claiming an identity extending beyond national categories. At first glance, this appears to be a very liberated position. Taking a closer look, however, occupying this seemingly neutral place of “neither Japanese nor Korean” results in a ‘minus identity’ based on the denial of existing identities: Having “nowhere to belong to (*ibasho ga nai*)” lies at the centre of Yû’s writings. Through the birth of her son, Yû Miri was forced to take responsibility and actively deal with problems concerning nationality and identity. Faced with these questions, she could not get around rethinking her own position as well. In an interview shortly before the birth of her child she said: “I have consciously avoided building up an identity as a Japanese-Korean. But this has put me into a very unstable, shaky position. (...) Now, I feel the need to rethink my stand,

including positions I have carefully avoided so far” (*Subaru*, 1999 (12), p. 108).

Her decision to give Japanese nationality to her son was motivated by her own lack of knowledge about the culture and language of Korea. If, however, she was one day confronted by her son, she said, she would have to answer questions about herself.²⁰ Yû has finally brought herself to the point where she can face the question of identity, and again she has chosen the form of literary expression to do so. In spring 2002, a daily newspaper will start publishing a novel in which the author will write about her grandfather, dealing with the question of why he migrated to Japan, abandoning his country and cutting off his children and grandchildren from their roots. Yû has been conducting research for this novel for some time. She told me that through these inquiries, she was not only trying to establish a link between herself and the past, but hoping to give some meaning to her own existence as a Korean born and raised in Japan.

8. Conclusion

Recognizing that Korea and the situation of the Korean minority in Japan respectively cannot be said to be the main concern of this author, in this paper I have focused on this aspect of Yû Miri’s works, analysing different images of Koreanness.

In order to return to the question of how ‘Asia’ is depicted in Japanese mass media in general and in Yû Miri’s works in particular, I once again would like to consider the perspective(s) from which ‘Asia’ is viewed. While it is possible for writers of Japanese nationality to locate themselves in a position opposite a more or less abstract ‘Asian Other’ which can be perceived as exotic, strange, close or familiar, etc., in Yû Miri’s case the situation is a different one. Considering her Korean nationality, it becomes impossible to draw a clear line and speak of a binary opposition between a (Japanese) ‘Self’ and an ‘Asian Other’. Yû once commented on her situation as follows: “It is precisely my torn situation as Japanese-Korean that has made me somewhat indifferent towards things like ‘identity’ or ‘self-searching’ (*jibun-sagashi*). And since the ‘self’ and ‘identity’ are neither static nor exist as something absolute, I do not think these questions are that important either. And yet, from the bottom of my heart I understand the feelings of people who cannot but search for their selves, seeking for meaning” (Yû, 1997 (b), p. 178).

Yû has long put aside the question of ‘self’ and ‘identity’ but recently has come to feel that “this has put [her] into a very unstable, shaky position” (*Subaru*, 1999 (12), p. 108) and is now turning towards Korea. It is obvious that the difference of perspective that can be observed between writers of Japanese nationality and Yû Miri (and, of course, other *zainichi* authors) is closely linked with a difference in the motivation for writing

as well. Yû is clearly not interested in describing 'Asia' as such, nor does she show a genuine interest in Korea as a country. She is driven by the will to shed some light on her family background, motivated by very personal reasons quite independent of literary fashions. And even though she might not abandon her credo of being "neither Japanese nor Korean", Yû Miri's decision to write about her ancestors might well be a step towards a more positively defined identity.

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Yû Miri, 2001 (b), *Ikiru*, Tôkyô: Shôgakukan.

About the Author:

Kristina Weickgenannt majored in Japanese Studies, Political Sciences and International Relations of Asia and Africa at Humboldt-University of Berlin, University of Duisburg and Free University of Berlin. From 1995-1996 she studied Japanese Language and Contemporary Japanese History at Rikkyô University, Tôkyô. In 2000, she completed her M.A. with a thesis on the use of fish and water metaphors in the works of Yû Miri. From 2000-2001, she participated in the JET-Program, working as a Coordinator for International Relations at the Nagano Prefectural Government. Now a PhD candidate working on Yû Miri, she is currently a Research Fellow at the University of Trier and a participant in the DFG project "Japan's 'Orientation towards Asia' Respectively Japan's 'Return to Asia' in Literature, Media and Popular Culture", at Trier University.

¹ This minority is referred to as *zainichi chôsen kankokujin* in Japanese, often abbreviated as *zainichi* which literally means 'being in Japan'. In this paper I will mostly follow the Japanese usage and employ the term *zainichi* when speaking of the minority. Otherwise the term is rendered as 'Japanese-Korean' rather than 'Korean-Japanese'. The reason for this choice which was made in accordance with the other panel members is that most of the *zainichi* are not 'naturalized', that is they are not Japanese nationals (different from, e.g., Korean-Americans who are usually American citizens). To use the term 'Korean-Japanese', we felt, was to ignore this status which is partly due to the immense difficulties facing those who apply for Japanese nationality, but also involves questions of ethnic identity.

² The "Tôkyô Kid Brothers" lead by Higashi Yutaka (1945-2000).

³ The first encounter is described in Yû, 1997 (a), pp. 171, 174-175; see also Yû, 2000, Yû, 2001 (a, b).

⁴ For a more profound discussion of this literature see Königsberg, 1995; Takeda, 1995; Kim, 2001 (b).

⁵ The prestigious Akutagawa Prize, which had been awarded to a *zainichi* Korean author only once before (Ri Kaisei, in 1972) was successively given to Yi Yang-chi (1989), Yû Miri (1997) and Gen Getsu (1999). In 2000, Kaneshiro Kazuki won the Naoki Prize for entertainment literature.

⁶ Interview with the author (see endnote 11).

⁷ This is not to say that Yû is refraining from political statements all together – in her essay series *Kamen no kuni* (1998) she is voicing highly critical views concerning several aspects of contemporary Japanese society. However, she is clearly not distancing herself from Japan but is taking the position of a concerned individual, firmly integrated into (Japanese) society.

⁸ This is the case in the following works: *Mizu no naka no tomo he* (1988), *Himawari no hitsugi* (1993), *Ishi ni oyogu sakana* (1994), *Tôroku* (1996), *Mizube no yurikago* (1997), *Inochi* series (started 2000).

⁹ Even in her third play, *Himawari no hitsugi* (*The Sunflower Coffin*, 1993), which takes place in a *zainichi* milieu and directly deals with many typical *zainichi* problems, this setting seems to merely provide a background for the story. The tragedy of the two main characters really develops quite independently of their being Japanese-Korean.

¹⁰ It is important to note that for Yû Miri, this does not mean she has positively defined herself as *zainichi*. In an interview broadcast by NHK (BS 2) in 1999, Yû emphasised that she is “different from earlier Japanese-Korean writers like Ri Kaisei who might have thought of themselves as neither Japanese nor Korean, *but still positively defined themselves as zainichi*. (...) Putting a minus together with another minus does not add up to a plus, so I cannot do anything but keep saying I am neither [Korean, Japanese] nor [*zainichi*].” See NHK (BS 2), 1999.

¹¹ The interview took place in Tôkyô, July 13, 2001.

¹² Interview with the author (see endnote 11).

¹³ See endnote 10.

¹⁴ Unless otherwise indicated, all translations from Japanese are my own.

¹⁵ Faulstich was referring to popular movies, but as Gössmann, 2002, and Phillipps, 2002 have shown, these categories are applicable to other media as well.

¹⁶ Interview with the author (see endnote 11).

¹⁷ Interview with the author (see endnote 11).

¹⁸ A photo taken on this day was published in Yû, 2001 (a).

¹⁹ E-mail communication with the author (July 18, 2001); and Yû, 2001 (a): pp. 135-136.

²⁰ Interview with the author (see endnote 11).